

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR IMAGE CAPTURE,
SELECTION AND COPYING

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 **1. Field of the Invention**

The present invention relates to a method and apparatus for use in digital image capture, and which permits a region of the captured image to be selected and copied, for example to a file, or to a computer's "clipboard", or directly into a computer's application program.

10 **2. Description of Related Art**

There are many known apparatus and application programs for capturing a digital image of, for example, a document or photograph or scene. Such apparatus and programs will often have a display facility for displaying the captured image, a selection facility for enabling a region of the image to be controllably selected, and a copy facility for enabling the selected region to be copied to a file, or to a temporary "clipboard", or directly into an application program.

An example of such an application program is CamWorks 4.2 produced by Xerox Corporation. This application provides plural selection tools for enabling a user to specify how the selection of an image region is to be performed, to suit the particular image characteristics. For example, for a picture image, then a suitable selection tool is a rectangular box selection tool, where the user defines a rectangular boundary around the selected region.

The CamWorks 4.2 application also includes plural copying tools for enabling the selected region to be copied to a target location, file or application. Each time that copying is performed, the user has to specify the particular copy tool to be used, for example, "copy as text", "copy as a color image", or "copy as a black and white image". This controls how the image data is processed, and the type of file generated.

Reference is made to the operations manual for CamWorks 4.2, the content of which is incorporated herein by reference, to provide technical information about the operation of the selection and copying tools.

As indicated above, many other forms of image capture apparatus and application programs are known in the art. Reference may be made, for example, to U.S. Patent No. 5,715,501 which relates to a digital copier, and to U.S. Patent No. 5,937,232 which relates to image processing.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Broadly speaking, one aspect of the present invention is to provide image control modes which control, at least in a default situation, a selection tool for selecting a region of an image, and a copying tool for copying the selected region of the image.

The control mode may be regarded as a global mode for controlling the choice of selection tools automatically. This requires minimal user input, and allows consistent repeated actions.

Preferably, the modes include at least one text mode, and at least one picture mode. Preferably the picture modes include a black-and-white (monochromatic) picture mode, and a color picture mode.

By using modes, the most suitable selection tool and the most suitable copying tool are controlled automatically by the image mode selected by the user. It is therefore no longer necessary for the user to select (or check) the selection tool and the copying tool on each occasion of use. Particularly for repetitive situations, such selecting operations are laborious and time consuming, and can lead to mistakes or inconsistent use.

In a preferred embodiment, the image control mode also controls the display of the image, for example, either as a text image, or as a black-and-white picture image, or as a color picture image.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Embodiments of the invention are now described by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 is a schematic block diagram showing the components of an
5 image capture system;

Fig. 2 is a schematic block diagram illustrating the functionality in a first embodiment;

Fig. 3 is a schematic control diagram showing the controls affected by control modes in the first embodiment;

10 Fig. 4 is a modified schematic illustration of modes in the first embodiment;

Fig. 5 is a schematic illustration of modes in an alternative modified version of the first embodiment;

15 Fig. 6 is a schematic block diagram illustrating the functionality of a second embodiment of the image capture system; and

Fig. 7 is a schematic control diagram showing the controls affected by control modes in the second embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring to Fig. 1, an image capture and processing system 10
20 comprises an image capture device 12, a data processor 14, a display device 16, a manual input device 18. and a data storage memory 20. The image capture device 12 may be any form of digital camera, or scanner, or copier for generating a digital version of a captured image. The processor 14, display device 16, the input device 18 and the memory 20 are typically components of
25 a computer system executing an image processing application program.

Fig. 2 illustrates the functionality of a first embodiment of the image processing application 22. The application includes an image input section 24, and image processing section 26. The application also includes a section of selection tools 28 for enabling a user to define and select a desired region
30 of a captured image. The selection tools 28 include a rectangular box

selection tool 28a and a word-by-word (or word-to-word) selection tool 28b. The rectangular box tool selection tool 28a operates by enabling the user to define a rectangular boundary around a desired region. The word-by-word (word-to-word) selection tool 28b operates by performing an optical
5 recognition algorithm to identify word patterns and the spaces between words. The user can then select a region on a word-by-word basis. A suitable word-to-word selection tool is described, for example, in commonly owned U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/438,891 entitled "Word-to-Word Selection on Images", the content of which is incorporated herein by reference.

10 The application 22 also includes a section of copy tools 30 for copying a selected region, and outputting copied region to the computer's "clipboard" for temporary storage, or to a file in the memory 20, or directly into another application program running on the computer system. The copy tools include a color picture copy tool 30a, a black-and-white (monochrome) picture image
15 copy tool 30b, and a text image copy tool 30c. Each copy tool generates data representing the image in a respective format, being respectively a black-and-white format, or a color format, or a text format.

In this embodiment, the application also includes control of a display mode 32, including a color display mode 32a, a black-and-white display mode
20 32b, and a text display mode 32c. The display mode represents the type of display generated on the display device 16. The color display mode 32a is typically a picture mode with a color attribute enabled. The black-and-white display mode 32b is typically a binary picture mode (e.g. black or white with no intermediate gray values). Alternatively, the black-and-white display mode
25 could be monochromatic with a gray scale (i.e. color disabled). The text display mode 32c may be a mode following optical character recognition (OCR) of the input image.

In accordance with the principles of the invention, the application 22 also includes an image mode input 34, which is set by the user to indicate the
30 type of image captured. The image mode may be selected from the following:

- (a) color picture mode
- (b) black-and-white picture mode

(c) text mode

The image mode 34 is used to control, at least by default, predetermined selections of the display mode 32, the selection tool 28 and the copy tool 30c.

5 Referring to Fig. 3, when the color mode 34a is selected, this sets the display mode 32 to be the color display 32a, the selection tool 28 to be the rectangular box selection tool 28a, and the copy tool 30 to be the color copy tool 30a.

10 When the black-and-white mode 34b is selected, this sets the display mode 32 to be the black-and-white display mode 32b, the selection tool 28 to be the rectangular box selection tool 28a, and the copy tool 30 to be the black-and-white copy tool 30b.

15 When the text mode 34c is selected, this sets the display mode 32 to be the text display mode 32c, the selection tool to be the word-by-word selection tool 28b, and the copy tool 30 to be the text copy tool 30c.

20 It is possible to provide the user with a manual override facility to modify the default settings to suit a particular situation, but the use of an overall mode control setting simplifies operation of the system. This is especially advantageous for highly repetitive applications, and can provide for more efficient operation and control. The risk of accidental selection mistakes, or ambiguous copy results, can be significantly reduced.

25 Fig. 4 illustrates a modified embodiment in which the application program provides two display outputs, a first being a real-time live display output 36, and the second being a frozen or "captured" display output 38. In Fig. 4, both of the display outputs 36 and 38 are operable in a color picture mode, a black-and-white picture mode, and a text display mode. The image mode 34 is used to control the display mode for both outputs 36 and 38.

30 In Fig. 4, a real-time or "live" text display mode is indicated. This may be facilitated if binarisation and OCR can be performed fast enough to appear responsive to changes in the images supplied by the camera. Otherwise, it may be possible to track movements of a document in the camera images

and to change the position of the displayed text (which allows reuse of the previous OCR results).

The display operation illustrated in Fig.4 can ensure that a document image is always displayed in both the live view and the frozen view, in the best mode for the document (as set by the control mode 34 selected by the user).

Fig. 5 illustrates a further modified embodiment in which the application program again provides two display outputs, the first being a live display output 40, and the second being a frozen or captured display output 42. The outputs 40 and 42, are similar to the outputs 36 and 38, respectively, discussed above except that the live output 40 operates only in a fixed, color display mode. This means that the live display output 40 is always a color picture display of the camera image. However, when the user switches to the frozen display output, the frozen image will always be displayed in a best mode for viewing the document (according to the mode control 34 selected by the user). The display operation indicated in Fig. 5 may be suited for applications which do not facilitate real-time OCR for a live text display mode.

Figs. 6 and 7 illustrates the functionality for a second embodiment. The same reference numerals used in Figs. 6 and 7 to denote features equivalent to those described above. The functionality is similar to that of the first embodiment, except that a simplified display 32d is used having only a color picture display mode. Therefore, the output from the display is not controlled by the image mode control 34. However, the mode control 34 still controls which selection tool 28 and which copy tool 30 are used to suit the document, and to simplify operation by the user.

It will be appreciated that the invention, particularly as illustrated by the preferred embodiments, can allow a clear and easy understanding of the user interface for a scanning tool. The displayed image can be well correlated with the information that is copied from the application to the computer's clipboard, or to a file. This can increase the productivity and usefulness of the scanning tool.

It will also be appreciated that the foregoing description is merely illustrative of preferred embodiments of the invention, and that many modifications may be made within the scope and spirit of the invention.